

Greenwich Citizen

100 Years of History

Perrot Memorial Library Celebrates its Birthday

Friday, October 07, 2005 - On Oct. 1, 1905, Perrot Memorial Library began in a small, empty classroom in Sound Beach School. It was an Englishman named John Perrot, who arrived in Greenwich during the early 1700s, who first envisioned what would become an Old Greenwich landmark. But it was his great-granddaughter, Annie de Camp Porter, who donated \$1,000 in 1904 to start a library after the Sound Beach community saw a need in eastern Greenwich and appealed to H.P. Porter, a New York socialite, for funding.

Though Perrot, the first schoolmaster in Old Greenwich, died in 1805 at 78, his founding of the boys' private school in 1766, now Old Greenwich School, was not forgotten and the library would be named after him. On Sept. 24, 1904, the first meeting of the library association was held and Perrot's first librarian, Marian Scofield, was hired for \$1 a week. However, \$1,000 was not enough money to construct a library building, so Perrot Memorial Library opened in the Sound Beach School classroom.

And that's where the library remained until 1916 when it moved to the Maher building, a storefront on Sound Beach Avenue. Today, the building is the second one south of the railroad tracks on the East Side of downtown Sound Beach Avenue. The space was 20 by 40 feet. By 1928, Perrot had accumulated more than 10,000 books, outgrowing its space. Again, it was a Perrot family member who donated funds to further the development of the library. Annie May Hegeman, Perrot's great-great-granddaughter, gave the library \$10,000. With that donation, the library would have its own building.

D. Everett Waid, a Perrot board member and past president of the American Institute of Architects, donated the land on which the library now sits at 90 Sound Beach Ave. in 1930, and the library opened to the public in 1931. It was because of Waid's initiative that the tradition of the well-known children's programs still remains today. Waid offered to design a plan for the library for free in exchange for the creation of a special children's room in memory of his wife, Eva Clark Waid.

Waid chose a Jeffersonian style for the Perrot, inspired by Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, which gave the building an older look. Today, the Waid Room houses adult books, but a dedication to his wife remains there. Now, the youth services section, the Radcliffe wing, rests on the second floor. Opened in 1998, the new wing was designed by architect Mark B. Thompson that created a seeming village lined with trees and program rooms designed to look like houses.

The Radcliffe wing, named in honor of its benefactors, added 70 percent to the library's space. The new addition was also funded by donations from Old Greenwich, Riverside and Mianus residents. Across the hall from the Waid Room is the Binney Room, named in honor of Edwin Binney and his wife, Alice. Binney, president of Binney-Smith and creator of Crayola Crayons in

1903, donated money in the 1920s to create Binney Park. Binney, a Greenwich resident, had the creek across from the library drained and created the park, now known as another Old Greenwich landmark.

Centennial Celebrations

"I really like the fact that we are so connected to the community. Our history has been one of partnership and cooperation," said Kevin McCarthy, library director. With the support of more than 500 contributing members to the annual appeal last year, Perrot has been able to continue to provide resources and renowned children's programs.

"We were founded by local families and we respond to local needs and local desires for inclination, recreational reading and programs, especially children's programs," said McCarthy. "That's our real strength." As part of the centennial celebrations led by centennial executive committee co-chairs Debby Southwick and Karen Taggart, storytellers like Grammy-nominated Bill Harley and renowned Japanese storyteller Masako Sueyoshi will be at the library on Nov. 10 and Oct. 12, respectively.

In addition, other centennial events designed to get people into the library include monthly programs featuring bookmarks and displays to reflect books and happenings that were significant during each decade of Perrot's history. The main event is "Among the Stacks," a benefit that will literally be held among the stacks of the 58,000-plus books of the library on Oct. 15. "It's a great chance for people in the community to come and celebrate the library," said Taggart, who estimates 300 attendees. The evening will include cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and a light buffet with silent auction featuring an overnight stay in the library for children, unique literary and local items and a Gary Calabro painting of the library.

Two other important works, *Perrot: The Story of a Library*, a book by Ann McDonald that chronicles the library's history, and a documentary directed by Neroli McSherry featuring some of the eldest Old Greenwich community members' memories of Perrot, will be for sale. While honoring the library's 100 years, the community can celebrate the present and look to the future. "We have a long history of partnering with community organizations and individuals," said McCarthy. "We have been an inspiration for lifelong learning and recreation and we just want to do more of the same."

Jennifer Cirillo